



Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service

POST INCIDENT ANALYSIS

**2nd Alarm Apartment Fire
101 Walsh View Terrace
Silver Spring, MD**

Incident Date: January 26, 2009



**Submitted by
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On February 22, 2009**

Incident Overview

Note: This post incident analysis is based upon the review of the incident audio tape, interviews with crews who operated at the fire scene and the completion and review of PIA Unit Fact Sheets. As of February 22, 2009, Unit Fact Sheets have not been received from the Unit Officers of E705, E754, or RS742 – therefore, the PIA may not accurately reflect the actions taken by those units.

On January 26, 2009, at 1924 hours, MCFRS units responded to 2101 Walsh View Terrace, Silver Spring, MD for a report of an apartment fire. Weather conditions at the time of incident were clear and cold with a slight wind. Darkness had set in and the evening rush hour was just coming to an end.

Units arrived on the scene to find a 3-story garden apartment structure with heavy fire conditions on the top floor and extension into the Bravo Exposure – a similar type of structure. An aggressive interior attack was mounted and the fire was contained and extinguished using a 2nd alarm complement of apparatus and personnel.

During the course of fire fighting operations, one fire fighter suffered burns to his hands and knees requiring treatment at a burn center. The injuries were not life threatening but did result in a “loss-time” injury status. In addition to the fire fighter injury, one civilian was treated and transported to the hospital for cardiac-related issues. This civilian was not the occupant of the fire apartment, but was an evacuee of the structure.

An origin and cause examination was conducted by MCFRS Fire and Explosive Investigations. The findings of that examination indicate that fire started in the living room area of #301 and was most probably caused by combustibles coming in contact with a lit candle.

The circumstances leading up to the ignition of the fire are at this time still under investigation. However, MCFRS units arrived on the scene and found the occupant of #301 outside of the structure – they also found both the sliding glass balcony door and the apartment entrance door open with fire emanating from both.

Damage to the structure at 2101 Walsh View Terrace was extensive – with severe fire and smoke damage in #301 and severe water damage in #201 and #101. There was also moderate fire damage on the top floor of the common stairway

Damage to the structure at 2103 Walsh View Terrace (Exposure B) was limited to moderate fire, smoke, and water damage in #302 and limited water damage in #202 and #102.

Total loss estimates for 2101 and 2103 Walsh View Terrace were estimated at \$700,000 structure and \$200,000 contents.

Structure/Site Layout

- The structure at 2101 Walsh View Terrace is part of a much larger garden apartment-style complex which includes multiple units and addresses.
- The complex is actually condominiums with a common layout of two units per floor instead of the often encountered four units per floor for a garden apartment layout.
- Several of the structures have a half basement/half crawl space arrangement used for storage and other activities.
- There is one centralized heating and hot water facility for the complex that supplies those utilities to the individual units.
- All of the condominium structures are Type 5 construction with no fixed fire suppression systems.
- The roofs of all structures in the complex are flat and constructed of dimensional lumber with a tar and chip surface covered with a rubber membrane assembly.



Fire Code History

- A review of the past and current fire code requirements for the structure revealed no code compliance issues.
- However, it should be noted that had the structure been protected by an automatic sprinkler system, the fire most likely would have been confined to the living room area of #301 in 2101 Walsh View Terrace – and quite possibly extinguished prior to the arrival of MCFRS personnel.

Communications

- E719 was enroute to a PIC on 7-Bravo when the Bravo dispatcher redirected the engine to the box alarm assignment. Units listening to 7-Bravo were able to respond more quickly than had the call just been dispatched starting with the pre-alert.
- While units were still enroute to the incident, the 7-Charlie dispatcher provided an update of the fire's location and reported that the RID was being sent. This action allowed units to expect a working fire upon arrival and it allowed RID units to arrive sooner than they would have had the dispatcher waited until first arriving units provided a report.
- The 7-Charlie dispatcher did a very good job communicating – especially in echoing the requests for additional resources.
- Once Battalion 701 arrived on the scene and an Incident Command Post (ICP) was established, 7-Delta was used to manage the units in staging and 7-Echo was used for all EMS operations.
- VRS was not needed, nor was it engaged.

Pre-Emergency Planning

- There were pre-fire plans for the structure other than a “complex” map drawn by Station 19 personnel.
- The operations at this fire did not require any special pre-fire plans.

On Scene Operations

- The structural integrity of 2101 Walsh View Terrace was never really in question during the operation. Although heavy fire conditions existed, initial crews made an aggressive interior attack that quickly darkened down the fire and structural compromise never occurred.
- At one point, the roof of 2101 was on fire; however that fire was limited to the rubber membrane and did not compromise the roof's structural assembly.
- Command was established by E719 in the Attack Mode and was transferred to BC701 upon his arrival.

- The ICP was BC701's vehicle which was parked at the A/D Corner of 2101 Walsh View Terrace. The ICP was identified using a roof-mounted, green strobe light.
- A command team was built using BC701, D700, and EMS703. The team operated without incident. Units arriving on the fire scene reported to the ICP for instructions or were directed to an assignment via radio.
- Upon the arrival of BC701, companies were just starting an interior fire attack. Heavy fire was issuing from the top floor of 2101 Walsh View Terrace on the Alpha and Charlie Sides with smoke pushing from the roof line of 2103 Walsh View Terrace. The initial command size-up determined an advanced fire on the top floor of an occupied multiple family occupancy with extension already occurring into a like occupancy on the Bravo Side.
- The initial command objectives/strategies mirrored RECEO VS with searches being the primary focus followed by controlling the extension into 2103 Walsh View Terrace.
- All initial efforts were directed at fire control in 2101 and 2103 Walsh View terrace while supporting searches of the effected occupancies.
- A 2nd Alarm had been requested by E719's OIC upon his arrival on the scene and this proved to be valuable in getting additional resources to the scene in a timely manner.
- The Safe Structure Fire Fighting SOP was followed and units did a good job of completing tasks and following additional orders issued by command.
- The incident was broken into the following groups/divisions: Division 3 (2101 Walsh View Terrace), Division 2103 (Exposure B – 2103 Walsh View Terrace), Roof Division, Division Alpha, Division Charlie, Rapid Intervention Group, EMS Group, and Fire Marshal Group. All divisions and groups interacted and communicated effectively.
- Apparatus access was somewhat limited due to the nature of how the complex was laid out. Both ladder trucks on the 1st Alarm had good positions and were used effectively in the fire attack operation.
- Attack line selection was adequate for the fire conditions presented and the type of occupancy. The back-up line chosen was larger than that initial attack line and provided adequate support to the fire attack operation. The attack line used to control extension in 2103 Walsh View Terrace was adequate for the fire attack operation in that unit.
- The fire had self-vented on Sides Alpha and Charlie prior to the arrival of MCFRS units. A 4-ft by 4-ft ventilation hole was cut in the roof over the fire apartment and this hole proved valuable in stopping the fire extension into 2103 Walsh View Terrace.
- The available water supply for the incident was adequate. At one point early in the incident there was a report of a pressure problem at E754, but that problem was resolved without incident.

Staging

- The 2nd Alarm units were staged at the entrance to the complex on Georgia Avenue. Units reported to the ICP for assignment or were given orders directly via radio.

Support Functions

- Rehab was established to the rear of the ICP and was handled by the EMS Group.
- MCFRS personnel were provided with food and drinks by Canteen 705.
- There was a significant issue with the number of occupants evacuated from 2101 and 2103 Walsh View Terrace as well as relatives and bystanders. Once evacuees were “rounded up” they were moved into the Americana apartment building where they were provided shelter and refreshments. T715 was assigned to assist the EMS Group in managing these folks.
- Crews were relieved by fresh crews or by crews leaving Rehab.
- There were no equipment or apparatus failures.
- Functions with outside agencies were properly coordinated (i.e. Police, Gas and Power Company,)

Safety Group

- The 2nd Due Engine (E754) was assigned as the Standby team since the EMS unit on the box alarm was not qualified to assume that role.
- Once the RIC (E705) arrived, E754 assumed the role of back-up to E719.
- One fire fighter was injured; he suffered second degree burns to his hands and knees. The fire fighter was the nozzle man on E719's attack line and he suffered the burns while combating the fire in the apartment. The cause of the burns was most likely due to steam from the superheated environment.
- Safety 700 was assigned as the Safety Officer for the incident and there were no safety violations noted.
- The RID was established on Side Alpha with E705's OIC serving as the RIG Supervisor.

Accountability

- The DOC prompted command to have the RIC gather PAS tags and set-up an accountability board – however that never was completed due to the incident being brought under control.

- Car 701 (K701) engaged in fire attack operations for several minutes without ever being given that assignment. Once located, K701 was assigned to operate as part of E721's crew.
- ECC provided an incident duration reminder and a PAR check was conducted at 1959 hrs with all personnel accounted for.

Investigations

- The origin of fire was located in the living room with combustibles coming in contact with a candle listed as the possible cause of the fire.
- FM10 was the Fire Marshal Group Supervisor and also handled the evaluation of code issues and the reoccupying of the structure.

Lessons Learned

- The first arriving engine company officer (E719) provided a very good on-scene report, established command, and requested a 2nd Alarm – all which provided a positive “first step” in directing the outcome of this incident.
- The building layout proved troublesome in that both the front and the rear entrance ways of each building had an address posted. In addition, there was a sign in the court yard for a Coleridge Road address that only applied to one structure in the string of structures in the complex. Sides Alpha and Charlie were confused for the first five to ten minutes of the incident – but the confusion did not affect the crews working on the interior of the structure.
- E719 was a four-person engine company which helped in stretching and getting in place the 300-ft attack line that was used as the initial attack line.
- AT719 was a three-person crew and was hampered in placing ground ladders. The driver of AT719 worked by himself for awhile deploying ladders and doing exterior work. A fourth person would have proven more affective for fire ground operations.
- Radio traffic at times was heavy – but messages were able to get through. The ICP was using/monitoring 7C, 7D, 7E, and 7O.
- E716 was working by themselves for awhile in Exposure B where fire had extended into #302 via auto-exposure from 2101 Walsh View Terrace. Additional help was assigned to Division 2103 when 2nd Alarm units arrived on the scene – and then there were at times too many personnel operating in Division 2103.
- There were numerous citizens and occupants that were needy in terms of questions and concerns and displacement – so much so that they became a hindrance at the command post. EMS703 worked to corral those folks away from the command post. Many were relocated into a nearby apartment building where they

received comfort and refreshments. T715 was assigned to assist with this effort.

Units on Incident

1st Alarm

E719 E754 E701 E705 E716
AT719, T701
RS742
A742D
BC701
BC704
D700
D700B
C742
SA700
EMS703

RID

AT718
RS741
M742C

2nd Alarm

E718, E702, E721, E712
T712, T706
M701

Other

M701
Canteen 705
MAU741

Conclusion

The stage for the success of this incident was set early with the arrival of the first due engine and ladder truck. Both companies worked together well to make an aggressive attack on a rapidly advancing fire while at the same time initiating the incident command process. The second due engine did a good job of assuming the Standby Team and then functioning as the back-up crew for E719.

The fire in 2101 and 2103 Walsh View Terrace was basically controlled by the 1st alarm companies with the 2nd alarm units being used to relieve crews and complete ancillary assignments. Fortunately, the fire fighter injury was not severe and no civilian injuries or deaths occurred.